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Libby schools' track work progressing

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Special to the Inter Lake

LIBBY — Work is moving ahead to replace the tracks at Libby Middle School and Libby High School, with assurances from contractors that the project will be completed by fall, said school Superintendent Kirby Maki.

A curb around the inside of the middle school track was being built this week, and crews were expected to move on to the high school track after completing that phase of the middle school project, Maki said.

With fall sports practice starting in mid-August, school officials were concerned that reconstruction of the tracks could get in the way.

"If they're doing big heavy work in there, that's going to be a problem," Maki said.

But the contractors, LHC Inc. of Kalispell and Kootenai Paving of Libby, believe the project will be far enough along by then that the work won't get in the way of practice, Maki said.

The school district was unable to use the tracks last school year following the discovery of asbestos-contaminated vermiculite in the soil. Material from W.R. Grace's vermiculite mine had been applied as a track surface in the 1970s.

The contaminated soil was removed through the Environmental Protection Agency's emergency response program, which is funding the project to replace the tracks and contaminated equipment.

"It was cheaper for them to destroy it than to try to clean it," Maki said.

The middle school track will be finished with an asphalt surface similar to that previously used, while the high school will get an all-weather rubberized surface with some improvements.

The high school track will be expanded from six lanes to eight and will be topped in red rubber.

"It's a state of the art material as far as the surface, so it's probably going to be the best track you could have," Maki said.

Application of the surface at the high school track is scheduled for early September. The job has to be finished before wet weather sets in.

The tracks will be an improvement, Maki said.

"Our kids have had to go without for a year, so the better facility will hopefully make up for that loss."